

P 080922Z JAN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0975  
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS PRAGUE 000011

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EZ](#) [KNAR](#) [SCUL](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC: HOLOCAUST ERA ASSETS CONFERENCE IN JUNE 2009

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Top Czech officials are urging attendance at the highest possible level by the United States and 46 other invited countries at the June 26-30 2009 Prague Conference on Holocaust Era Assets (HEA). The Czechs see the conference as a follow up to the 1998 Washington Conference and want it to have an equally important impact in identifying solutions to outstanding Holocaust issues. The GOCR is putting particular emphasis on education and is sensitive to potential controversies in dealing with art and financial issues. It will work through diplomatic channels in the preparatory phase to avoid problems in gaining approval of a conference declaration. The Conference will occur at the conclusion of the Czech Republic's EU presidency. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On November 26, 2008, Ambassador Milos Pojar, GOCR special representative, and Denisa Haubertova, advisor to DPM Alexandr Vondra, briefed members of the diplomatic corps regarding the 2009 Holocaust Era Assets Conference. The stated objective of the Conference is to "evaluate activities which followed from the conclusions of the 1998 Washington Conference and give a new impetus for further international cooperation with the emphasis on education." The conference will take place in Prague and Terezin, Czech Republic, on June 26-30, 2009. According to Haubertova, the timing in late June 2009 is intended as a symbolic conclusion of the Czech EU presidency. It is planned that the conference will be officially concluded by signature of a joint declaration, referred to as the "Terezin Declaration," focusing on the historical aspects of the Holocaust and the current situation of Holocaust victims, as well as on education and preserving the moral message for future generations.

¶3. (SBU) During his December 4 meeting with Representative Robert Wexler (D-FL), Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Communities Tomas Kraus, who is also involved in organizing the June 2009 conference, summarized the expected results of the June conference: 1) Bring attention to the outstanding tasks, but avoid controversial issues; 2) encourage Holocaust education, including the establishment of a special education institution in Terezin; 3) establish in Prague an international association for provenance research of art displaced during World War II.

¶4. (SBU) Originally, the Czechs envisioned a much smaller conference that would focus on looted art only. However, with the support of DPM Alexandr Vondra, who served as the Czech Ambassador to Washington during the 1998 Washington Conference, the conference has evolved into a much broader project. After consulting with Ambassador Christian Kennedy, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, on the idea of the follow-up conference, DPM Vondra proposed the Holocaust conference to the Czech government. On July 23, 2008, the Czech government approved the event and tasked DPM Vondra and Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg with the conference's preparation. Ambassador Milos Pojar was appointed as the country's special representative for coordinating the conference.

¶5. (SBU) The organizers invited 47 countries and 22 NGOs to participate. (Note: An official letter of invitation signed by PM Mirek Topolaneck was sent to President Bush in July 2008. End note.). Three EU commissioners, namely Margot Walstroem, Jan Figel and Vladimir Spidla, were also invited to assure high level EU participation. The GOCR hopes for top officials from invited countries to participate, and thus give the proceedings and the final declaration a strong political mandate. DPM Vondra reiterated during various official meetings, including his November 17-19 trip to the United States, that it would be very important for the overall impact of the conference to have a high level official from the United States attend the conference, i.e. Secretary of State or

Vice President.

¶6. (SBU) Kraus stressed during his December 4 Prague meeting with Rep. Wexler that the participation of the U.S. Secretary of State would be crucial. Moreover, he stated that it would be vital to have the information about the U.S. delegation by the end of March at latest, so that other delegations could appropriately adjust the level of their participation. Rep. Wexler promised to pass this information to the transition team and mentioned that he may also seek to form a congressional delegation to the 2009 conference.

¶7. (SBU) In preparing the conference, the Czech government is heavily relying on the experience and know-how of the U.S. government and NGOs which organized the 1998 Washington Conference. During his November 17-23 trip to the United States, Ambassador Pojar, Tomas Kraus, and Denisa Haubertova met with Ambassador Kennedy and representatives of various organizations, including the Claims Conference, American Jewish Committee, World Jewish Congress, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and a delegation of Holocaust survivors. Their meetings in the United States focused among other things on the scope and structure of the planned conference. The organizers adopted several recommendations from Ambassador Kennedy, including the concept of a friends-of-the-chair group, which could share preparation costs and help shape the agenda of the respective working groups.

¶8. (SBU) According to the current Czech plans for the conference, the opening plenary session would be devoted to reviewing issues such as financial assets, bank accounts, insurance, and other financial property. The United States will assist the Czech Chair with the preparations for the financial assets recovery and financial compensation portion to ensure all stakeholders are consulted. Former Treasury Deputy Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat has agreed to deliver the opening speech on this subject. Then the participants would divide into four working groups: 1) Holocaust education, remembrance, research, and social programs for Holocaust victims; 2) immovable property, both private and communal; 3) looted art; and 4) Judaica and Jewish cultural property. The chairs of respective groups together with the friends-of-the-chair will work on the agenda and composition of the working groups, and will draft respective parts of the final declaration. The following countries have declared their interest in participating in the financial and conceptual preparations: United States, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Austria, and Russia.

¶9. (SBU) The Czech government has allocated CZK 500,000 (about USD 25,000) for the conference, a sum substantially less than the full cost of the conference. DPM Vondra mentioned financing issues during his recent U.S. trip and stated that contributions from private as well as federal sources were welcome. He left the United States with a promise of USD 100,000 by the Claims Conference. It is expected that the friends-of-the-chair will also share some of the financial burden.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Having approved the hosting of the 2009 HEA conference, the Czechs have been careful to work through consensus and hope to avoid at the conference certain controversial issues, such as insurance claims and problems concerning looted art. They have heard Ambassador Kennedy's advice that sensitive bilateral diplomacy will be necessary to prepare the ground for progress at this conference. In the Czechs' view, the conference should motivate participants to undertake additional positive and tangible steps. The Czechs feel very keenly the need for action. As Kraus recently pointed out: "It is the last chance to do something, while the Holocaust survivors are still around. Five years from now, there may be no survivors."

¶11. (SBU) Comment continued: While the intent to make this conference a successful cap to their EU presidency is clear, the GOCR appears behind schedule in nailing down concrete preparations. They indicated a time-line for working group meetings would be forthcoming, but so far potential hosts for preparatory meetings have not been formally approached for concept papers, dates, or financial contributions. The Czech allotment of approximately \$25,000 would seem to indicate that they are expecting sizeable contributions from other governments and NGOs. Furthermore, the Czech proposals for a special education institution in Terezin and establishment in Prague of an international association for

provenance research of art displaced during WWII are new ideas that we have not yet been fully briefed on.

¶12. (U) Ambassador Kennedy (EUR/OHI) has cleared this cable.